Analytical Comparisons Between 1200 and 1750 CE

I. Political and Governance Comparisons (1200–1450)

Sultans vs. Caliphs in Islamic Governance A major distinction in the Islamic world was the difference between a Sultan and a Caliph. A Sultan is a leader who wields supreme political and military authority and is responsible for enforcing Sharia law within their territory. However, unlike a Caliph, a Sultan does not possess the religious authority to make changes to theological or religious doctrines. This separation of political might from religious innovation was a key feature of the Delhi Sultanate, which was one of the first large, non-Arab Muslim states to be headed by a Sultan rather than a Caliph.

The Delhi Sultanate vs. Other Mongol-Conquered Regions The Delhi Sultanate stands out in history because it was one of the few states that successfully repelled the Mongol invasions, specifically from the Chagatai Khanate. This success is compared to the fate of the Chinese, Persians, the Caucasus region, and Eastern Europe, all of which suffered widespread death and the total destruction of their cultures at the hands of the Mongols. Historians believe the Sultanate's military stability saved the population of the Indian subcontinent, allowing its population to grow by 40% and its economic production to increase by 20%—outcomes that would not have occurred had the Mongols succeeded.

The Sui Dynasty vs. the Qin Dynasty The Sui Dynasty (581–618 CE) is compared to the earlier Qin Dynasty because both played the pivotal role of reuniting the Han peoples under a single centralized administration after long periods of disunity. Just as the Qin ended the Warring States period, the Sui reunited China for the first time since the fall of the Han Dynasty, planting the seeds for the stable, centralized state systems that later dynasties would refine.

Tang Territorial Extent vs. the Han Dynasty The Tang Dynasty is noted for reaching a high point in Chinese history, particularly through territorial growth achieved via conquest, diplomacy, and marriage. The sources emphasize that the Tang kingdom eventually exceeded the maximum territorial reach of the revered Han Dynasty, which had previously been the benchmark for Chinese imperial power.

Song Dynasty vs. Tang Dynasty Scope While the Song Dynasty (960–1279 CE) unified most of China, it was territorially smaller than the Tang. Despite this smaller size, the Song continued and even expanded the

Chinese imperial golden age through unprecedented innovations in technology, literature, and economics, such as the creation of the first standing navy and the issuance of state paper money.

European vs. Japanese Feudalism The sources highlight a striking "unintentional" similarity between the decentralization of Europe after the fall of Rome and the feudal era in Japan (13th–17th centuries).

- **Regional Leadership:** Powerful military leaders in Japan, known as **Shoguns**, served as regional leaders in a manner very similar to the role of a **King** in Europe.
- **The Land-Owning Elite:** The Shoguns were supported by a noble land-owning class called the **Daimyo**, which mirrors the European **nobility**.
- **The Warrior Class:** The professional soldier class in Japan, the **Samurai**, with their strict codes, essentially mirrored the European **Knights** and their codes of chivalry.
- **The Peasantry:** In both systems, peasants or serfs provided labor in exchange for protection, but a key difference existed in social status: in Japan, peasants were considered more honorable than the **merchant class**. In Europe, the merchant class would eventually grow in power and reputation, whereas East Asian societies placed merchants at the very bottom because they were seen as profiting from the labor of others.

Aztec vs. Inca State Administration The two great American empires utilized very different methods to manage their territories.

- **Aztec Approach:** The Aztec Empire was a military confederacy that did not set up local administrations. Instead, they focused almost exclusively on the collection of **tributes**—including slaves—from conquered tribes.
- **Inca Approach:** In contrast, the Inca were successful conquerors who incorporated defeated peoples into a highly organized, centralized empire. They maintained a wealthy capital (Cusco) and used state-run work programs like the **Mit'a system** to build roads and temples, rather than just collecting tribute.

II. Economic and Technological Comparisons (1200–1750)

Old Knowledge vs. New Knowledge in the Renaissance The European Renaissance (meaning "rebirth") was sparked by a combination of **"Old" Greco-Roman knowledge** and **"New" Chinese and Islamic knowledge**. The "Old" knowledge consisted of classical works rediscovered during the Crusades that had been preserved by Arab scholars. The "New" knowledge included innovations like paper, printing, and the compass that filtered through the Mongol and Islamic worlds.

Portugal's Trade-Post Empire vs. Spain's Conquest-Based Empire In the Age of Exploration, the two leading Catholic powers used different strategies.

- **Portugal:** Created a **"trade-post empire"** in the Old World (Indian Ocean), focusing on capturing strategic port cities and forcing merchants to buy a **cartaz** (permit) to trade.
- **Spain:** Focused on a **"conquest-based empire"** in the New World (the Americas), amassing wealth through the direct cultivation of cash crops and the extraction of silver.

Spanish vs. Ming Chinese Silver Mismanagement Both the Spanish Empire and the Ming Dynasty suffered from the mismanagement of silver.

- **Spain:** Discovered massive amounts of silver but failed to understand how to handle the resulting **inflation** or adjust taxes accordingly, leading to their decline in the 17th century.
- **Ming China:** Adopted a disastrous **"silver-only" tax policy**, forcing peasants to produce luxury goods to earn silver. This led to a surplus of silk and tea, causing their value to plummet (**price deflation**), while the production of necessities like food and iron decreased.

Traditional vs. New Labor Practices During the Post-Classical era, traditional labor—mostly **coerced labor** like peasant agriculture and slavery—remained dominant. However, new forms emerged:

- **Guilds:** In Europe, these functioned as cartels that controlled trade and labor by setting prices and quality standards.
- **The Mit'a System:** In the Americas, this was a state-driven coerced labor force used for large-scale public projects.

III. Social and Cultural Comparisons (1450–1750)

Peninsulares vs. Creoles Within the Spanish racial caste system in the New World, a sharp distinction was made between two types of "white" Europeans.

- **Peninsulares:** Europeans born in Spain or Portugal; they were seen as "superior" because their culture came directly from Europe.
- **Creoles:** Children of Europeans born in the Americas. Although ethnically the same, Creoles were viewed as lower in status than Peninsulares, a tension that would eventually fuel 19th-century revolutions.

The Gentry vs. the Traditional Nobility In the Early Modern Era, a new class called the **Gentry** emerged in England and the Netherlands.

- **Nobles:** Traditionally held power through hereditary lineage and oaths of fealty to the king.
- **Gentry:** Regular citizens and merchants who accumulated wealth through trade and purchased land to engage in **commercialization** (selling agriculture for profit).
- **Political Shift:** Unlike the nobles who "rented" land from the King in the feudal system, the Gentry viewed their land as **private property**. Their refusal to pay taxes without representation led to the creation of the **House of Commons**, giving non-nobles legislative authority for the first time.

The Mughal Empire vs. the Delhi Sultanate While both were Islamic empires in India, the Mughals were far more successful because of their **tolerance**. The Delhi Sultanate is described as "intolerant and iconoclastic" because it destroyed Hindu and Buddhist art. In contrast, the Mughal emperors, coming from a mix of Persian, Turkic, and Mongol cultures, embraced diversity and syncretization, gathering the support of local Hindu and Sikh kingdoms.

Ottoman vs. Safavid Religious Split A defining 200-year conflict existed between the **Ottoman Empire** and the **Safavid Empire**. This was a state-level manifestation of the **Sunni/Shi'a split**. The Ottomans enforced **Sunni Islam**, while the Safavids officially established **Shi'a Islam** as their state religion, creating a Persian identity that formed the basis for modern-day Iran.

Women’s Status: Southeast Asia vs. Europe/Islam Women in Southeast Asia enjoyed far more social power and mobility than their counterparts in the Christian or Islamic worlds. In Southeast Asia, women primarily ran and controlled the buying and selling of goods in port cities, often owning their own shops and ships. In contrast, the rest of the world remained "rigidly patriarchal," though the Ottoman Empire allowed some women to own property and bring divorce claims to court, depending on their social class.